



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE CONCEPT OF THE GOOD.

HAPPINESS and perfection may, I think, fairly be taken as the watchwords of the two opposing camps in modern ethical discussion. Into the one term or the other can be compressed the essential thought of almost every one who has attempted to define the moral ideal. This statement will hold at least for all teleological theories. A purely formal system will necessarily reject both ideals. Thus Kant repudiates, along with the 'empirical principle' of happiness, the 'rational principle' of perfection.¹ But Kant, it should be remembered, has given us no proper treatment of the Good as end. As he himself puts it, the end "is conceived only negatively," and 'not as an end to be effected.'² His entire discussion falls under the concepts of duty, virtue, moral law, and freedom.

On the one side are those who, with Mill, Sidgwick, Gizycki, and many of the evolutionistic school, find the ultimate Good solely in certain affective states, or modes of sensibility. That the view of these writers is more truthfully and impartially expressed by the term happiness than by any other single word, appears not only from their emphasis upon the higher forms of feeling, but also from the attempt to substitute for happiness either hedonism or pleasure. Although often employed, and sometimes even accepted by representatives of the theory, 'hedonism' can never be sufficiently separated from its almost constant Greek connotation of sensuous pleasure, to do full justice to the ethical view in question.³ For a similar reason 'pleasure,' in its current use, is also unfitted for such service.

On the other hand, those who oppose this interpretation of the Good as false or inadequate, and insist upon a more rationalistic or idealistic view, can all be said to find the ethical end in the perfection of the individual or of society. Self-realization, or any

¹ *Grundlegung zur Metaph. der Sitten* (Abbott's trans.), p. 60.

² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³ Cf. the Latin *voluptas*, by which the Roman writers translated ἡδονή.

similar term which individual writers may prefer, does not appear to be misrepresented in any essential point by perfection, which implies the harmonious activity and development of all the powers of the self, with due emphasis upon those which are distinctive of human nature.

One reflection naturally arises in view of the simple fact that these two opposing theories have permanently held a place in ethical science. Is there not, *prima facie*, a strong presumption that each contains important elements of truth? Otherwise would not criticism, working with free hand, have overthrown the one or the other in the course of centuries? Vitality is not, to be sure, always a safe criterion of worth. And yet whenever two opposing views have both attracted to their support, through successive centuries, equally able and disinterested thinkers, it is at least highly probable that neither one possesses a monopoly of the truth. Thus in the controversies between spiritualism and materialism, rationalism and empiricism, necessity and freedom, individualism and socialism, not to mention others, one would be inclined to assert that each side has represented a permanent element of truth, though not always that precise measure of truth which its whilom defenders have supposed. But in the case of the ethical theories in question, it is easy to see that they have moved, not in parallel but in slowly converging lines, and that they show a tendency to approach still more closely.¹ It is difficult to find a writer of the present day, who, however much he may criticise happiness as the ethical end, does not admit its importance, and attempt to give it some sort of recognition. This attempt is often exceedingly lame, and happiness is disposed of as a kind of *ἐπιφανόμενον* of the moral life—a *Begleiterscheinung* which has no organic place in the theory.² On the other hand, it is easy to see that hedonism, in its historical development,

¹ Such a mediating theory as Professor James Seth's 'Eudæmonism' is highly significant of this tendency.

² For illustrations, one may point to the treatment of happiness in such standard works as those of Mackenzie and Paulsen. Professor Paulsen, after frankly acknowledging that all distinctions of value are ultimately grounded in feelings of pleasure (*System der Ethik*, Vol. I, p. 229), develops his 'Energism' without further reference to this fact.

has been forced more and more to recognize the truth in the position of its opponents. Early Greek hedonism is separated by a wide gulf from any modern forms of the theory.

What then, we are led to inquire, is the truth in each of these theories? And can the two views be so organically related that each may have a well-defined place in the concept of the Good? An attempt thus to relate them implies that the concept is in a sense dual; that, at least, it has two distinct aspects, or poles, each of which must be taken into account in its exposition.

In a previous article,¹ I presented what seems to me to be the permanent and essential truth of the happiness theory. It was there shown that the term Good is quite meaningless apart from those affective states, or sensibility modes, in which all objects of thought, and all contents of experience, are ultimately registered and evaluated; and that, out of relation to such states, or modes, the objects of thought and the contents of experience would be utterly indifferent. To attempt, therefore, to define the Good and leave out of account an element which, if completely eliminated, would leave the term absolutely meaningless, is a procedure which quite puts to blush the proverbial rendering of 'Hamlet with Hamlet left out.' Nor can one content oneself with the belated admission that happiness is important and must have its due place, while the ethical end is expounded without giving it any intelligible position whatever.

But equally fatal, I hold, to a true and faithful interpretation of the concept of the Good, is its limitation to this affective, evaluative principle. The Good is objective as well as subjective; it has its active and constitutive, as well as its passive and evaluative side; it possesses an ideational, as well as an affective content. To limit the application of the term either to the one side or to the other, is to put asunder what nature has joined together—so indissolubly are the two wedded. The analogy of knowledge is here suggestive. Knowledge is not merely a subjective psychological process; but, as knowledge of things, it stands in relation to an objective order, upon which it is dependent, and without the guaranty of which the psychological process may become mere

¹ "The Evaluation of Life," *PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW*, July, 1898.

subjective illusion. So with the Good : it too must be objectively grounded, for, like knowledge, it arises in a world-order upon which it is dependent.

The necessity of an objective principle, or norm, is further suggested by the fact that one is totally unable to produce directly any desired sensibility mode. By an act of will, one can not inaugurate immediately a feeling of satisfaction of any kind whatever. Such a feeling is always dependent upon, or an element in, the activities of the self. And one must, therefore, frankly admit, that, to state the fact that all experience has this affective and evaluative aspect, is really to convey very little information of a practical kind. One is still quite in the dark as to how the good life is constituted. It is not, of course, the task of ethical science to lay down the particular rules of conduct ; but it must so state the end of conduct as to offer a principle under which all the particular rules, and even the specific acts of life, will fall. And the happiness theory is found wanting, when one makes the legitimate demand for such a principle for practical guidance. If, therefore, the happiness principle has seemed to possess a kind of advantage in the speculative field, by virtue of its unity and apparent definiteness, when compared with such ideals as perfection or self-realization, which are confessedly somewhat vague statements of what the self should do or should become, yet these latter, despite this acknowledged vagueness, are the better practical norms. Their comparative value as practical principles may be illustrated in the limited sphere of the physical life. As between the two precepts, (1) Seek the greatest physical satisfaction, and (2) Seek the highest physical development, the physiologist will not hesitate which to recommend as an end for practical guidance. At the same time, he will have no doubt that, other things being equal, the satisfaction of a purely physical nature which one can enjoy will depend upon, and keep even pace with, the perfection of the bodily organism. It is not merely that the clamant demands of certain appetites which press for immediate satisfaction, destroy the true perspective of the life of feeling, and thus cause one to put in hazard the greater and more enduring joys of life, or even to

barter them irrevocably for transient pleasures. It is quite as much the fact that knowledge, to be practical and usable for human ends, must show how the really valuable and lasting affective states are objectively grounded, what are their springs and sources in human action.

Here belongs also the so-called 'paradox of hedonism,' namely, that happiness must not be sought directly, or, as it has been expressed, that 'to get happiness you must forget it.' Now all that this mooted paradox means, when critically examined, is that happiness must be sought through the appropriate objective sources and channels, and with the same absorption of interest in the means, with which any practical end is sought. Indeed, it needs to be insisted that it is a paradox which holds equally throughout the whole range of man's practical aims, and that not only happiness, but also all other ends which men pursue, must, in like manner, be forgotten in order to be attained. Thus, the honor and respect of one's fellow-men, wealth, and even spiritual perfection, must be lost sight of in a very real sense, if they are to be secured in large measure. Honor and respect can be won only when one forgets all about winning them, and is completely absorbed in those activities in which are developed and displayed the qualities to which alone men respond with these sentiments. Wealth, too, is found equally coy to immediate approaches. Who by allowing his thought to dwell upon the golden pile has ever become possessed of it? Who, rather, has won wealth who has not forgotten the end, and lost himself in those commercial and business activities which are the appointed means of financial success? The miserly instinct is fatal to large achievement in this field. Even spiritual perfection is no exception to the paradox. 'Who by taking thought can add a cubit to his stature?' The cubit of growth is only added to character in the current of the world's activities, in self-forgetful and altruistic endeavor.

"Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille,
Sich ein Character in dem Strom der Welt."

In fine, it is seen that, out of all these paradoxes of our practical life, the 'paradox of hedonism' has been chosen as scape-

goat and sent forth into the wilderness of polemics, burdened with the sins of all the others. Those who are still disturbed by it will do well to study the conduct of some well-trained child of ten or twelve years. Such a child has already learned that, if happiness is to be had when the ordinary sources of satisfaction fail, as on a rainy day, or when subject to unpleasant moods, one can find it only by losing oneself in some absorbing pursuit, or by seeking to promote the happiness of the other members of the household. The child that has been wisely trained seeks happiness under these conditions, and gets it, the 'hedonistic paradox' notwithstanding.

This explanation was due to a much-abused 'paradox.' But the permanent truth which it contains is seen to be precisely that upon which I have been insisting—the necessity of an objective grounding of the Good, of taking into account its active, constitutive side. It may be justly urged, I think, that the question at issue is largely one of terminology. Shall the Good, as ethical end, be limited to the subjective, affective, evaluative aspect of experience, or shall it also include the objective, ideational, constitutive aspect? My contention is that it should include both, and that both classes of facts covered by the above terms fall under the single notion.

It has already been suggested that all affective states arise in strict dependence upon the functions of the organism concerned. But it is possible to go a step further, and to correlate the degree of satisfaction experienced in such states with the perfection of the activity, so that perfection becomes the objective norm of conduct, and the constitutive principle of the Good. Happiness and perfection (of activity), thus brought into direct and organic relation, appear as the two sides of the shield, or as the two hemispheres which round out the concept.

The physical or sensuous feelings of pleasure and satisfaction are obviously dependent upon the functioning of healthy organs, or of a healthy organism. Here one is on tolerably firm scientific ground in affirming that, in the long run, physical satisfaction is proportionate, *ceteris paribus*, to the perfection of the bodily organs. It is also to be noted that progress towards per-

fection involves an increase in the range, as well as in the degree, of activity. Certain low forms of animal life, like the *amœba*, are mere masses of living matter with no differentiation of special organs at all. Such processes as digestion are processes of the whole mass; nourishment is absorbed by one part as readily as by another. The possible activities of such an organism are most narrowly limited, and there is a corresponding limitation of the capacity for feeling. Ascending in the scale of animal life, one finds an increasing differentiation and specialization of function, rendering the organism capable, through this 'physiological division of labor,' of a wider range of activity, a more varied diet, and a greater choice of environment. Through the high degree of specialization of his nervous system, man possesses an advantage over the lower animals in all these respects. He is not only capable of adapting himself to very different environments, but, to a large extent, constructs his own environment out of the raw materials which nature supplies. His food is varied to a degree without parallel among the lower animals, and he has become master of so many means of locomotion as almost to transcend the limits of space and time. As the perfection of life, measured by the capacity for varied and complex functions, increases, the susceptibility to weal or woe also increases. From the point of view of capacity for merely physical enjoyment and physical suffering, man is at the apex of the animal kingdom.

The idea of perfection involves, further, the development of those powers and the exercise of those functions which are peculiar to the species in question. Here Aristotle's analysis has not been superseded. Every type of being has its distinctive function. That of man cannot be found either in the life of vegetation and growth, or in that of sensuous appetite, both of which man shares with lower forms of life. His distinctive function, and consequently his distinctive excellence, must lie in his rational nature. Here is found the proper, truly human perfection and happiness.¹ He who accepts anything less takes the brute's portion, not the man's. And is it not possible to correlate perfection of activity and happiness in the spiritual as well as in the

¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. I, ch. vi.

physical sphere? So far as experience goes, thought seems to be *satisfying* and *delightful* in proportion as it is successful in reaching its goal, solving its problem, and gaining its longed-for insight. To be sure, we recognize that, as far as present and personal satisfaction is concerned, the visionary or mistaken thinker may experience as much as he who thinks truly. But we always mentally reserve—and rightly—for such an one the pain of disillusionment, and the hard clash with the facts of the actual order; and for the other, also, the ill effects of his wrong-headed views.

The law of development which states that an increased range of activities is accompanied by increased satisfaction of feeling, holds good in the spiritual as in the physical order. Compare the satisfaction open to the mind which has many and varied resources, with that of the mind which is limited to a narrow range of ideas—the satisfaction of the man who is interested in art, in science and literature, in history and philosophy, with that of the uncultured man, or even of a narrow specialist who has but one interest. The person whose interests are confined to a single field is capable of a full intellectual life, and so of intellectual enjoyment, in only one environment; while the person of wide interests is at home in almost any environment. For such an one all nature teems with possibilities of satisfaction. The world is his home, and he can live intellectually in any climate. And just as it is the function of certain of the higher animals, and of men most of all, to create in part their environment, so the most perfect type of mind is that which is not only at home anywhere in the kingdom of nature, but which also by its own productive power creates its intellectual environment, and thus is able to dwell in a world of truth and beauty of its own construction. Such a mind, even if shut out from the intellectual satisfaction which the outer world offers, is yet ever in the presence of fair forms and beauteous prospects, which yield unflinching solace. This is the meaning of Aristotle's ideal life of theoretic and contemplative activity, which for him was both the most perfect and the happiest. "Feeling becomes enlarged, spread out, as well as deepened and consolidated, by the development of representation, imagination, and

thought. The growth of ideation is thus a necessary condition of all the richer, more varied emotive experience."¹

But this view of the relation and correspondence of perfection and happiness assumes, it will be urged, an agreement which cannot be proved by the facts of human experience, but is even contradicted by certain of those facts. Especially if happiness be admitted as psychologically equal to pleasurable feeling, it will be said that the greatest *quantum* of such feeling may, for aught we know, be found in the lower, the sensuous sphere. While the demands of the ideal of perfection point clearly to the development and exercise of the spiritual nature, may not the claims of happiness lead one in the opposite direction? Thus a real dualism, it will be said, makes its appearance. The two principles which have been presented, instead of being both alike the dictates of one master, the Good, prove to be the commands of two; and he who would be guided by both may well be rebuked by that old but none-the-less valid utterance, "No man can serve two masters." In answer to this objection, it must, first of all, be admitted that it is impossible to give an exact or scientific demonstration of the thesis that these two factors of the good life will always completely coincide. Their ultimate and complete coincidence is certainly matter of faith—faith that the world-order is, in its deepest nature, rational and moral. I do not see any other ground on which one can escape the possibility of an awful breach between duty and personal interest.

But if hope of a complete demonstration must be abandoned, I am not so hopeless of the case if one attempt the more modest task of seeking only to present considerations which, failing of strict proof, yet satisfy the judgment. Such is the nature, it should be observed, of the evidence with which we are compelled to content ourselves upon all the deeper and more weighty concerns of life. We cannot get mathematical, or even strictly logical proof in any of the practical affairs which stand closest to our interests. But if there is satisfactory evidence concerning

¹ Sully, *The Human Mind*, Vol. II, p. 81. Cf. also p. 13: "Our life of feeling is conditioned to a larger and larger extent as we develop by processes of internal representation, (recollection, imagination)."

any such matter, I believe there is evidence that, even quantitatively, the pleasurable feelings which attend elevated thoughts, pure affections, and ideal and altruistic aims, are greater than those found in the sensuous sphere. If no *a priori* demonstration can be given, the empirical and historical evidence is, I think, far stronger than is commonly admitted. Indeed it seems, to use *quasi* theological language, as if the Devil himself must have been astounded at the readiness with which the moralists have been inclined to give up the case. The greater intensity which is sometimes claimed for the sensuous pleasures is far more than counterbalanced by their brevity, to say nothing of the pains which often precede and follow them. It is surely a weighty fact that out of the whole army of competent witnesses—and by competent, I simply mean those who have had adequate experience of both kinds of pleasures—scarcely a single one can be found who does not give unequivocal testimony to the brevity and pettiness of the lower as compared with the higher pleasures, *qua* pleasures, and without regard to other aspects of the case. This statement, of course, assumes that the psychological attempt to differentiate happiness from pleasurable feeling, is not justified; and that if happiness is defined, not as the ‘sum of pleasures,’ but as their ‘harmony,’ this definition can only mean that there are pleasures of harmony; *i. e.*, that the feeling of the harmonious activity of all the powers of the self is psychologically a feeling of pleasure. But this is a question for the psychologists to decide. All that I am concerned in maintaining is that, whatever the verdict of the psychologists, a person need have no hesitation in saying to any one who chooses the brute’s portion of satisfaction instead of the man’s, that he is taking the smaller portion. The sacrifice of the immediate impulses and desires is not an ultimate or absolute sacrifice. It is ‘dying to live.’ And the renewed life which follows such a death is a fuller, richer, and more abundant life of feeling as well as of ideation. From this point of view, idealistic and altruistic aims are abundantly vindicated. They tend more completely than anything else to lift the individual out of the narrow circle of private interests which foster both anxiety and *ennui*, to free him from those petty jeal-

ousies and selfish pains which so sorely distress mankind, and to place him where all his powers will be challenged to the most perfect development. With a devotion and self-abandonment akin to the spirit of the deeply religious nature, the ethical idealist may live so constantly in the presence of these aims that he receives from them a joy unequalled by any other. In devotion to duty he experiences the truth of Wordsworth's lines :—

“ Stern lawgiver ! Yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace,
Nor is there anything so fair,
As is the smile upon thy face.”

Yet all of these ideal aims which are pursued can be shown to be reducible, in the last analysis, to ideals of happiness and perfection. The Good, as ethical end, or ideal, finds its consummation in a blessed and perfected humanity.

The question of the motivation of conduct, and with it ‘psychological hedonism,’ demands a word. And just here the value of this ‘double-aspect’ theory for which I am contending, is evident in that it explains the facts of human conduct. What is the object of desire ? What is the conceived end which moves to action, and furnishes the dynamic principle of conduct ? While ‘psychological hedonism’ has been pretty generally abandoned, as being an inadequate answer to the problem, it has never been shown that pleasure itself is not *an* object of desire among others. Indeed, just this appears to be the case. The end is conceived, sometimes as pleasure, sometimes as an object or activity, without conscious reference to the pleasure which may be found in the pursuit of the object or in the exercise of the activity. It is now the affective, now the ideational side ; at one time the conceived pleasure, at another the interest in the objective end, which is the dynamic of conduct. Any explanation of motivation which ignores either the one side or the other, is inadequate because it does not reckon with all the facts of consciousness which are germane to the inquiry.

At still another point is appeal actually made to both sides of the concept, namely, in deciding between certain alternative courses of conduct. I have strongly insisted upon the superior

value of perfection over happiness as a practical norm, as an ideal of conduct, and a goal of ethical striving. But this advantage, which is a very real one, must not be allowed to obscure the fact that there are frequent cases when appeal has to be made directly and solely to the comparative pains and pleasures involved in two alternative lines of conduct, in order to choose between them, and to determine the path of duty. One could enumerate many instances of this kind. For example, of two cases of need, distinguishable only by the degree of suffering involved, which ought I to relieve first? Or which shall I leave altogether without aid, if I can not relieve both, and am therefore compelled to choose between them? Of two pleasures, indifferent save in degree, that I may give to friends, which ought I to confer? Clearly in such cases my conduct is determined by an estimate of the relative pains and pleasures involved, and no criterion of perfection, or of any other sort, can apply. But the acts in question are a part of conduct, are 'consciously purposive' acts, and must be explained by one's theory. Only by accepting the good as having two sides or aspects, can all the facts which demand explanation be successfully dealt with.

And this view suggests the question of the possibility of a final synthesis of the two classes of facts with which I have thus far been dealing. Is it possible to overcome the kind of dualism in the concept of the Good which has appeared in the foregoing discussion? Can a still higher principle be found, capable of bringing both happiness and perfection into synthetic unity? My answer is that no such unity can be found, save in the concrete life of the self, or of the moral person. But this is precisely that unity which it is the task of ethical science to break up and subject to analysis; just as it is the task of psychology to subject to analysis the psychical processes, which also have their unity in the concrete mental life of each individual. It is the Good of *man* with which the concept has to do. In treating it, we have to discover what are the ultimate elements, or essential features, of that life to which the term can be applied. And when critically examined, it is found to yield an element of feeling, which I have described as the subjective, passive, affective, and evaluative side

of the concept, and, corresponding to this, and in organic relation to it, another factor which may be called the objective, active, ideational, and constitutive side. These may be further summarized and described as respectively the elements of happiness and of perfection. To neglect either one is to neglect an essential aspect of the ethical ideal. To attempt a deeper unity is but to point to that actual, concrete life of personality, in which they are indeed embodied and united, but which, viewed merely as a unity, yields no insight for the science of ethics, as it yields none for psychology. If, then, personality be employed to express the ethical ideal, it remains barren until it is subjected to analysis. And, when analyzed, it yields the familiar dualism of sensibility, or feeling, and intellect, or reason, the relations and respective claims of which still remain to be determined and adjusted. For scientific purposes, therefore, it offers at most a merely formal unity like that of the general notion of the Good. One is still left with a 'double-aspect' theory, which, in the sense expounded, must be permanent because based upon psychological facts. The dualism is not, however, intolerable to thought, since the two series of facts are seen to stand in a direct and organic relation the one to the other.

In conclusion, it remains to point out that the Good is but one of the fundamental ethical concepts, and does not of itself yield a complete and rounded ethical theory. While it is the primary concept, which must in a sense be the key to all the others, the notions of duty, virtue, moral law, and freedom, must all be pressed for their meaning if one is to explain all our moral judgments in an articulated system of thought. That the Good, or ethical end, is the basal concept is indicated in part by the fact that, were there no good of happiness and perfection, the idea of duty would be meaningless. Apart from some good to be won or lost, the sense of obligation, however strong it might be, or however imperative its utterances, could never be rationally justified. Only in a thoroughly teleological view can thought find rest.

WALTER G. EVERETT.